

VZCZCXRO8204
OO RUEH DU RUEH MR RUEH RN
DE RUEH SB #0863/01 2661042
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 221042Z SEP 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY HARARE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3471
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE
RUEH AR/AMEMBASSY ACCRA 2313
RUEH DS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 2432
RUEH RL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0947
RUEH BY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1710
RUEH DK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 2065
RUEH KM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2486
RUEH NR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4918
RUEA IIA/CIA WASHDC
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHMFISS/EUCOM POLAD VAIHINGEN GE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1581
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 HARARE 000863

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR G. GARLAND
DRL FOR N. WILETT
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
ADDIS ABABA FOR ACSS
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR E. LOKEN AND L. DOBBINS
STATE PASS TO NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR B. PITTMAN
STATE PASS TO FWS FOR MICHELLE GADD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2018
TAGS: [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ENVIRONMENT SUFFERING AS POACHING INCREASES

REF: 07 HARARE 1130

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Katherine Dhanani for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Increasing pressures from poaching, deforestation, and Zimbabwe's economic free-fall pose serious threats to Zimbabwe's wildlife. Poaching is on the rise, with at least 38 rhinos killed so far in 2008. While much of this poaching has come from organized groups trafficking ivory, skins, and tusks to Europe and Asia, some has also been by villagers attempting to protect their crops or grazing areas. The decline in tourism dollars, which private conservancies and Zimbabwe's parastatal Parks and Wildlife Management Authority (Parks) use to maintain their activities, has hurt conservation efforts. Parks has suffered increasing political pressure and budget constraints in recent years, which has had a further negative impact on conservation efforts. Revenue from American hunters is a significant source of funding for Parks; in a reformed Zimbabwe, many safari operators believe tourism will be one of the fastest sectors to recover, provided the environmental decline is halted soon. END SUMMARY.

Poaching with Impunity

2. (SBU) Raoul du Toit, director of the World Wide Fund's (WWF) Rhino Conservancy Projects, told poloff that, although the black rhino population in Zimbabwe has experienced net growth this year, poaching has increased dramatically in 2008. Of the 144 rhinos poached since 2000, 38 were killed thus far in 2008. Rhino populations have dropped steadily over the last 15 years on state-owned and other lands while Zimbabwe's private conservancies have - despite poaching -

experienced the highest rhino growth rates in Africa. The southeast lowveld area of Zimbabwe is home to three large private conservancies - including the nearly one-million acre Save Valley Conservancy (SVC), founded in 1992 - which are home to about 400 of Zimbabwe's 525 rhinos. Before 2000, no rhinos were poached in these conservancies, but poaching increased dramatically with the initiation of the fast-track land resettlement program in 2000. Since then, over 59 rhinos have been poached in the lowveld conservancies. In the last three years, the proportion of rhino shootings (versus snarings) has increased dramatically, indicating a more concerted effort to kill specific animals with "desirable" horns.

13. (C) Du Toit told poloff that in the last five years, only two poachers in Zimbabwe had been convicted. However, they were released on just US\$5 bail. In every other case, despite convincing evidence and - in one case - a confession, the poachers went free or the charges were dropped. Du Toit and other conservationists believe that the poachers are well-connected to government insiders who have influenced their cases. Du Toit said that in addition to rhino poaching, there is massive poaching of zebras, which do not require special export tags, for the German furniture market. He said that much of the contraband is smuggled across the porous border with South Africa by well-organized networks that traffic the goods to Asia (ivory, tusks, and hides) and Europe (mostly zebra hides).

14. (C) Clive Stockil, founder of the SVC and one of

HARARE 00000863 002 OF 004

Zimbabwe's most highly regarded conservationists, told poloff that there have been no convictions of poachers in the SVC even though anti-poaching personnel employed by the conservancies have turned over ballistics evidence and names of poachers to authorities. He is deeply concerned about the growing threats to wildlife in the lowveld and throughout Zimbabwe. He cited reinstated law and order, an impartial judiciary, and a prioritization of humanitarian response - especially food - as the most important steps a new Zimbabwean government could take towards improving the environment. If the MDC is granted control of the Ministries of Home Affairs and Justice, he believes this could be possible, citing corruption in the police and judiciary as key stumbling blocks to prosecutions of poachers.

Power Cuts Fuel Deforestation

15. (C) Dr. David Cumming, professor at the University of Zimbabwe and former Deputy Director of Parks, told poloff that in addition to poaching, deforestation has increased dramatically, further fueling environmental decline across the country. Consistent, ongoing power cuts throughout Zimbabwe have led many families to rely on burning wood for heat and cooking. Dr. Cumming said this deforestation is notable in satellite images of Zimbabwe and increases vulnerability to erosion and flooding.

Parks and Wildlife: Limited Budget, Increasingly Politicized

16. (C) Director of Zimbabwe's Parks and Wildlife Management Authority, Dr. Morris Mtsambiwa, told poloff that poaching is a serious issue and that about 100 elephants had been poached thus far in 2008. He said elephant poaching is particularly problematic in and near Chizarira and Hwange National Parks (in the west) and to a lesser extent in the Zambezi and Limpopo River valleys. He cited food, ivory, and horns as the main motives for poaching. He also conceded that some of his staff had been implicated in elephant poaching, but said the Authority had dealt with those individuals.

17. (C) Parks and Wildlife - a parastatal since 2002 - is allowed to take in forex and has been financially independent of the state budget since 2000. Regardless, declining tourism revenues have depleted Parks' funds (reftel). Dr. Cumming told poloff that in the 1980s, Parks had operated on a budget of about US\$250/square kilometer. He said he would be surprised if Parks was currently operating on US\$10/sq km.

Parks has increased other money-making endeavors such as crocodile farming to boost its meager budget. Dr. Cumming believes Parks is in serious financial trouble. He also believes that the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) does not understand environmental issues or the potential contribution of parks and tourism in rejuvenating Zimbabwe's economy.

18. (C) Dr. Cumming, Stockil, and du Toit all praised Dr. Mtsambiwa, who has a PhD in ecology from the University of British Columbia and has worked for Parks since 1985, as competent and doing "the best he can" under significant pressure. (COMMENT: Dr. Mtsambiwa extolled the virtues of the American National Parks system at length to poloff and spoke fondly of his visits to the U.S. END COMMENT.) However, he has come under growing pressure in the last couple of years from the increasingly politicized oversight board, which includes members appointed by Environment Minister Francis Nhema. According to du Toit and Dr. Cumming, the board has

HARARE 00000863 003 OF 004

become increasingly involved in internal management of Parks.

Du Toit cited two members of the board, Vitalis Chidenga and Jerry Gatora, as forming an "unholy alliance" for their reported involvement in corruption deals and close ties to ZANU-PF hardliners. Chidenga, in particular, is reportedly very close to Minister Nhema, and is the point man for land reform as it relates to wildlife management.

Land Reform Beneficiaries Threaten Wildlife

19. (SBU) With the land reform program in 2000, ZANU-PF supporters were settled in the area between SVC and Gonarezhou National Park (GNP), which is part of the Transfrontier Conservation Area (TFCA) with national parks in Mozambique and South Africa. These settlements not only block potential migration patterns between the SVC and TFCA, but also pose significant poaching threats to wildlife. According to WWF, all cases of armed rhino poaching have occurred in areas where subsistence farms surround parks or conservancies. Recent settlers may be attempting to eradicate the rhinos not for their horns, but to consolidate their farming areas. Small-scale farmers have attempted to use pesticide-laced melons to kill rhinos that were destroying their crops. Plans are underway among the private conservancies and National Parks to create corridors for wildlife. However, this will require relocating several villages. (COMMENT: Driving through the area on September 17 and 18, poloff observed very little agricultural activity in these villages, aside from limited livestock grazing. END COMMENT.)

American Hunters Contribute to Conservation... and SDNs

10. (C) Stockil believes that wildlife safaris and ecotourism represent the easiest and fastest means to rejuvenate Zimbabwe's economy, particularly at the local level. When Stockil started the SVC in 1992, he and other landowners in the SVC planned to focus on photographic tourism. However, since the land reforms of 2000 started, photographic tourism in the lowveld has suffered, and now he and others like him are almost entirely dependent on hunters. Stockil estimates that over 90 percent of his clientele are American hunters. Dr. Mtsambiwa told poloff that up to 92 percent of the Parks and Wildlife budget comes from

hunting-related revenue and that about 60 percent of hunters in Zimbabwe are Americans.

¶11. (C) Don Heath, a professional hunter and former Parks official, told poloff that some American hunters inadvertently contribute funds to properties owned by Specially Designated Nationals (SDNs). Numerous safari areas are owned by individuals on the Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) list of SDNs (reftel). However, many of these safari areas and SDNs do not organize hunting safaris on their own. Rather, they sublease hunting rights to other safari operators who bring in clients - including unsuspecting Americans - who are unaware that they are hunting on land owned by an SDN. (NOTE: Post is exploring means to help Americans better identify these areas. END NOTE.)

COMMENT

¶12. (C) As reported reftel, hunting remains a vital source

HARARE 00000863 004 OF 004

of revenue to both Parks and private conservancies and cutting off American hunters from Zimbabwe would have a devastating effect on efforts to maintain Zimbabwe's conservation efforts. The politics that influence Parks indicate that, in addition to the importance of balancing ministries, the MDC should push for appointments on the boards of parastatals and in administrative positions in the ministries in order to promote a reform agenda. Continued and increased poaching - without prosecution - reflects the ongoing and widespread impact of Zimbabwe's economic and judicial crisis. In addition, it reflects the probable collusion of the current regime with traffickers and corrupt schemes. Despite these pressures, Zimbabwe's parks and private conservancies pose significant potential for rapid recovery if tourists regain confidence and return to Zimbabwe. END COMMENT.

DHANANI